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Review of *Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940* By William Wyckoff

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Creating Colorado: The Making of a Western American Landscape, 1860-1940. By William Wyckoff. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. xvi + 336 pp. \$30.00

Most settlers and visitors to Colorado came across the Plains, watching the Front Range of the Rockies slowly materialize from what seems to be a mirage on the horizon. While the eastern third of the state is within the Great Plains, it is the mountains and beyond that dominate our perception. William Wyckoff uses Colorado's diverse and distinctive regions as a framework for his fine historical and cultural geography of the state. Appropriately, he begins with the mountains, the state's spiritual heart, and then visits the Piedmont Heartland, that zone between mountain and Plain where Denver and most of the population reside, followed by the eastern Plains, the southern periphery and its Hispanic heritage, and the western slope. The book's emphasis is on the state's formative period of development from 1860-1920. For each region Wyckoff looks at the encounter of people and place, observing how natural resources and the physical landscape have structured and limited the possibilities of settlement, development, and exploitation. He is also clear about how much effort Coloradans have made to overcome these limitations and the boom and bust cycles of this process.

Great emphasis is placed on Zelinsky's doctrine of first effective settlement as a key determinant. Wyckoff is especially good at describing the process of landscape intensification, as initial choices and actual constructed patterns and processes are literally hardened, fixed, built, and marked on the land, becoming lasting signatures of occupancy and the framework for all subsequent transformations.

Wyckoff's research is broad and deep (a rare error is the spelling of Olmsted), but it is his combination of archival and field research that is most telling. A keen reader of the sensory environment, his text gives the rich flavor of being emplaced in descriptions of Colorado's climates, colors, spaces, and materials. For a

landscape so often associated with natural scenic splendor, the book excels in its urban landscape analysis, from its formative expressions in mining camps and colony towns to regional centers and Denver. His description of the mining townscape is particularly fine. An excellent selection of maps and images is an essential adjunct to his text. The period he discusses is less than a lifespan and concurrent with the rise in modernization and technology. As we arrogantly think of our era as one of unique and dramatic change, it is helpful to imagine the experience of individuals who lived through these times. The years from 1920 to 1940 are discussed in an excellent final chapter that also reads as the preface for a hoped for subsequent volume that would discuss the maturation and implications of these formative patterns.

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